

# Strategy Research Project

## Joint Vision for the Korean Peninsula - Can We Get There?

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2012

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## USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

### **JOINT VISION FOR THE KOREAN PENINSULA – CAN WE GET THERE?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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On June 16, 2009, United States President Barack Obama and Republic of Korea President Lee Myung-Bak issued a Joint Vision Statement for the Alliance of the United States and the Republic of Korea. The joint statement laid out a shared vision for the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia region in order to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The four main objectives are centered on the future of Korea, setting the stage for peaceful reunification, elimination of North Korean nuclear weapons programs and promoting human rights in North Korea. North Korea's unpredictability not only poses a threat on the Korean Peninsula but to the entire Northeast Asia region. North Korea is a multifaceted, complex problem that requires a multifaceted approach. Trilateral cooperation with China coupled with all the elements of the Alliance's elements of national power can set the conditions for the Joint Vision Statement to become a reality in this century.



## JOINT VISION FOR THE KOREAN PENINSULA – CAN WE GET THERE?

We meet at a time of great challenges. On the Korean Peninsula, North Korea has abandoned its commitments and violated international law. Its nuclear and ballistic missile programs pose a grave threat to peace and security of Asia and to the world.<sup>1</sup>

—President Barack Obama

On June 16, 2009, United States President Barack Obama and Republic of Korea (ROK – South Korea) President Lee Myung-Bak issued a Joint Vision Statement for the Alliance of the United States and the Republic of Korea. The joint statement laid out a shared vision for the future of United States and the Republic of Korea Alliance to ensure “a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula, the Asia Pacific region and the world.”<sup>2</sup> “Since defeating North Korean aggression in 1953, the Alliance has enforced the Armistice Agreement under the auspices of the United Nations Command (UNC), stood united against provocations, and ensured the peace on the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>3</sup>

On August 8, 1953 the United States and South Korea entered into the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) that provided the basis for a strong security alliance and partnership between the two nations. The Alliance continues to exist today with the forward deployment of 28,500 United States troops in South Korea. This has been the cornerstone of peace for over six decades. This partnership has brought peace and stability not only to the peninsula but to the entire Northeast Asia region.

However, for the last three decades, North Korea’s nuclear weapons program has continued to develop and grow. North Korea continues to proliferate nuclear weapons through nuclear testing and increased delivery capability, which has caused

great concern about the future of peace on the peninsula and stability in the region. Due to North Korea's dire economic situation, continued isolationism and the unpredictability of the North Korean Government, there is fear that North Korea could sell its nuclear fissile material and technology to other regimes or non-state actors or continue to provoke or attack South Korea's sovereignty in violation of the Armistice Agreement.

In accordance with the Joint Vision Statement, both President Obama and President Lee agreed to maintain a robust defense posture, backed by allied capabilities that support both nations' security interests. The stated overall objectives are as follows:

- To ensure a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula and the region
- To set the stage for a peaceful reunification of North and South Korea on the principles of a free democracy and a market economy
- To eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programs, and ballistic missiles
- To promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people <sup>4</sup>

Can we get there? Can the United States/Republic of Korea Alliance reach these objectives alone or should we collaborate with the People's Republic of China to leverage their influence? This paper will examine these objectives in light of the current strategic environment on the Korean Peninsula and in the Northeast Asia Region, the recent North Korean regime change, and the implications each presents for the future. Although the Alliance has laid out an aggressive framework in the Joint Vision Statement to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this paper will submit that the Alliance alone cannot reach these objectives without Chinese collaboration and

cooperation in leveraging their influence over North Korea. This influence, coupled with the employment of all the elements of United States national power will set the conditions for this vision to become a reality.

### Strategic Environment

The Northeast Asia region consists of the following countries and littoral waters that surround them: South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, Japan, Taiwan and Mongolia.

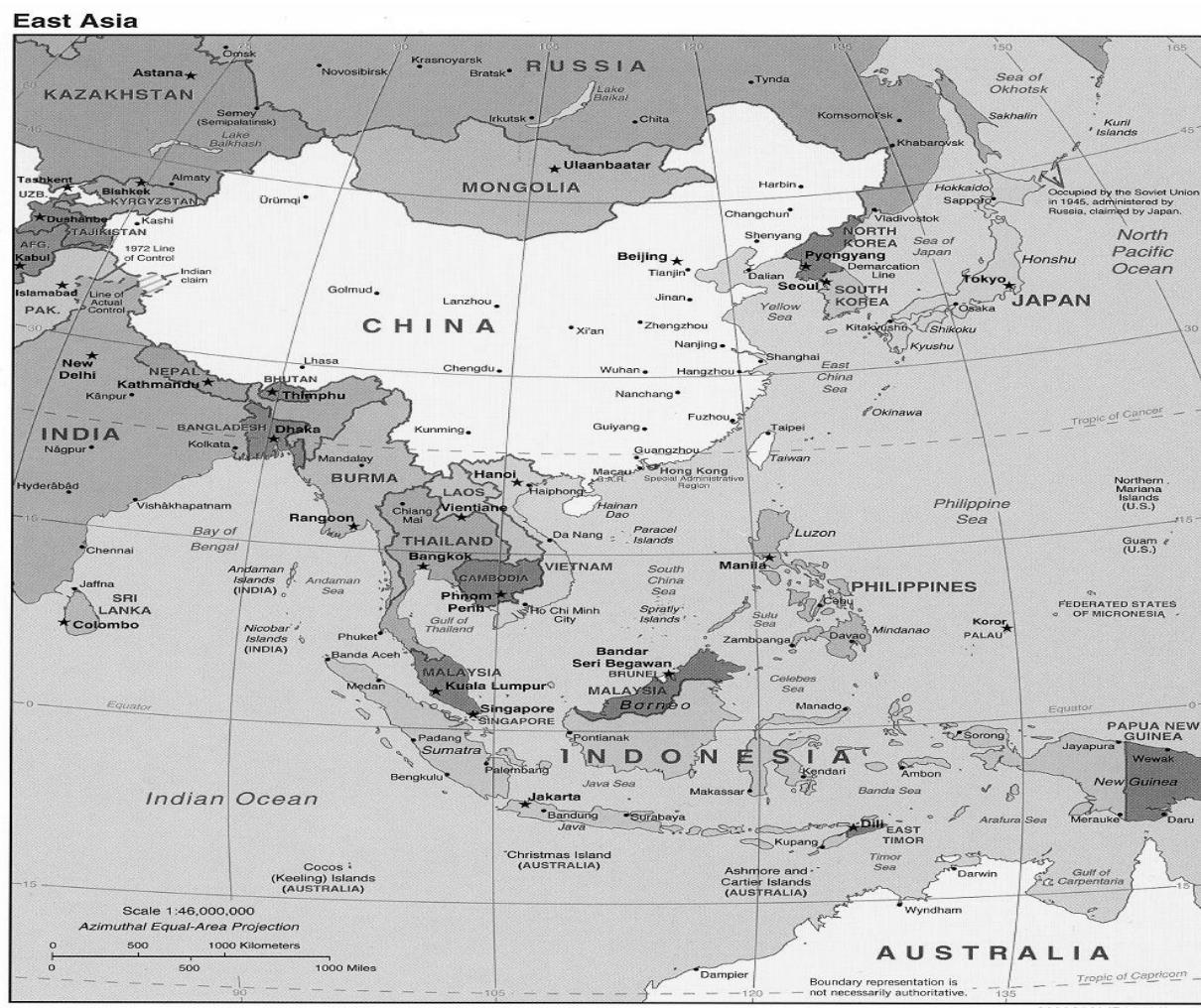


Figure 1

This region has historically been engulfed in conflict and instability. Many historians have referred to the Korean Peninsula as both a bridge and a dagger among its neighbors: A bridge across into Manchuria China and the Russian Far East for the country of Japan, and a dagger at the heart of Japan if used by China, Russia, or North Korea. The Korean Peninsula has been a bridge to and from the Asia mainland.<sup>5</sup> China, Russia and Japan each consider the Korean Peninsula to be of major importance to their strategic security.

The Northeast Asia region is also very important to the United States' national security, due not only to its geographical location but its significant strategic landscape. The militaries of China, Russia, North Korea and South Korea rank in the top ten largest militaries of the world.<sup>6</sup> China, Russia and North Korea all have nuclear programs. Although only China and Russia are recognized nuclear states by the United Nations, North Korea's quest to establish itself as a nuclear state is a major regional and global concern.<sup>7</sup> This concern has been amplified by General James D. Thurman on October 12, 2011, during the Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting and Exposition for senior military and civilian government leaders in Washington, D.C. "General Thurman cited two specific challenges that threaten the Republic of Korea – the rise of the People's Republic of China as an economic and military powerhouse, and the efforts of the Democratic Republic of Korea in the north to build and proliferate weapons of mass destruction."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, General Thurman reinforced the significance of the Alliance by stating, "The [Republic of] Korea – U.S. Alliance provides the U.S. with an important platform for responding to these challenges."<sup>9</sup> Triple hatted as the Commander of United Nations Command (UNC), Combined Forces Command

(CFC) and United States Forces Korea (USFK), General Thurman's perspective and analysis of the current strategic environment cannot be overstated.

In light of these realities, the United States National Military Strategy (NMS) objectives that directly apply to Northeast Asia are to:

- Counter Violent Extremism
- Deter and Defeat Aggression
- Strengthen International and Regional Security
- Shape the Future Force<sup>10</sup>

The United States utilizes its armed forces as an instrument of national power as the ways and means to reach these objectives. The United States has continued to maintain a robust military presence on the Korean Peninsula since the Armistice was signed in 1953. This forward presence has enabled the United States to stay engaged in the region and allowed us to influence the geopolitical, diplomatic and economic environments and advance our enduring national interests.

The United States national interests, as stated in the National Security Strategy (NSS), that also directly apply to Northeast Asia are the following:

- Security: The security of the United States, its citizens and United States allies and partners.
- Prosperity: A strong, innovative, and growing United States economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity.
- Values: Respect for universal values at home and around the world.
- International Order: An international order advanced by United States leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.<sup>11</sup>

Today, the Northeast Asia region is one of the most economically, politically and socially dynamic regions of the world due to its rapid growth and level of importance to the interests of the United States and the world. Moreover, much of the world's trade and energy sources that fuel the world's economy moves through the region's air and sea lanes.<sup>12</sup> These traffic corridors provide both natural resources and processed materials to developed and developing countries throughout the world. In particular, South Korea is a success story after transforming from a war ravaged country to the twelfth largest economy in the world with a highly educated and tech-savvy population.<sup>13</sup> The forward presence of United States troops on the peninsula working with South Korean troops has sustained this prosperity.

### The North Korean Threat

The military threat that North Korea presents to South Korea and to the region is real and omnipresent. This is evident with the recent North Korean sinking of the South Korean naval vessel, Cheonan, in March 2010, and the North Korean artillery shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyong Island in November 2010, that caused both military and civilian casualties. North Korea maintains the world's fourth largest conventional military with 1.2 million active duty personnel, 5 to 7 million reserve personnel, 1,700 aircraft, 800 naval vessels and more than 13,000 artillery pieces. Seventy percent of North Korea's ground forces remain staged within 90 kilometers of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) to include 250 long – range artillery systems capable of striking the Seoul metropolitan area and its 23 million inhabitants. In addition, North Korea maintains the largest special operations forces in the world with 44,000 to 60,000 personnel who are

capable of conducting asymmetric attacks against critical civilian infrastructure and military targets across the region.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, North Korea continues to build up and expand its nuclear energy and weapons capability. In 1985, North Korea was initially a signatory to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapons state. In 1992, both North and South Korea signed the Joint Declaration for a Non-Nuclear Korean Peninsula. However, in 2003, after terminating the freeze on its existing plutonium-based nuclear facilities, resuming the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel to extract plutonium for weapons purposes and expelling inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), North Korea withdrew from the NPT.<sup>15</sup> Since then, North Korea has continued to advance its nuclear weapons enrichment capability and has demonstrated the propensity to proliferate high-lethality weapons with nuclear testing in 2006 and 2009. According to the official North Korean Government Website, “The DPRK has nuclear deterrence as a life-insurance to protect the motherland. The United States, who put the country inside the “Axis of Evil”, and is threatening with a nuclear holocaust pre-emptive strike has created this situation and made this necessary.”<sup>16</sup>

The Six-Party Talks process was established in 2003, as a venue and a negotiation framework to resolve the nuclear issue in a peaceful manner. The members of the Six-Party Talks are the United States, China, Russia, South Korea, North Korea, and Japan. North Korea withdrew active participation in the Six-Party Talks in April 2009 in response to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) issuing a Presidential Statement condemning the North Korean launch of the Taepo Dong-2 missile over the Sea of Japan, in violation of the United Nations Security Resolution (UNSCR) 1718.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton continues to reach out to engage North Korean diplomats to discuss resumption of the Six-Party Talks process as well as engage in bilateral dialogue with North Korea about the denuclearization process. Most recently in November 2011 in Geneva, United States Department of State officials met with both North and South Korea envoys to discuss resumption of the Six-Party nuclear negotiations.<sup>17</sup>

While North Korea's participation in the Six-Party talks is inconsistent, the regime under President Kim Jong Il continued to expand its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs as a source of global prestige, a means of exerting regional influence and a source of hard currency.<sup>18</sup> The prestige of being both a communist state and a nuclear state that has the ability to exert influence or power over the United States or other regional states to invoke a response provided the Kim Jun Il regime a position of powerful importance in the global community. Although North Korea is not a large economic power, being a nuclear power state places North Korea as a key player not to be easily dismissed. North Korea's export to Libya, Syria and Iran of missiles, nuclear fissile material and nuclear technology is a source of hard currency which not only aids the regime's survival but manipulates the regional and global community.

“North Korea continues to focus its strategic efforts on regime survival and reunification of the peninsula on its terms.”<sup>19</sup> To this day, North Korea identifies the Korean War as, “The Great War for the Liberation of the Motherland” and the United States as “Imperialist Yankees.”<sup>20</sup> Whereby, the Government of North Korea declares that “the People’s Army decided to start the War for Liberation of the Motherland and protect [from] the U.S. invasion.”<sup>21</sup>

With the death of North Korean President Kim Jung Il on December 17, 2011, and the installation of his youngest son, Kim Jung Un, North Korea is still a formidable threat in the region due to the North Korean Government and military forces' isolationism, unpredictability and uncertainty. Kim Jung Un is reported to be 28 years old and has only been groomed for this position in the last three years, after his oldest brother fell out of favor with his father. He was recently appointed as a Daejang - an equivalent to an American four star general in the Korean People's Army.

USFK Commander, General James Thurman, stated that "Kim Jung Un's youth and inexperience increase the likelihood of a miscalculation, as does the imperative for him to establish credibility with the military hardliners he needs to support his succession."<sup>22</sup> Kim Jung Un has been accepted as the "Great Successor" by the Worker's Party of Korea – the only recognized political party in North Korea. He has also been named the "Supreme Leader" by the North Korean military forces. The government and military leadership has accepted him as the heir to his father's position and the transfer of power has been completed. However, only time will tell if their allegiance and loyalty to him will be sustained as the formal mourning period ended on December 29, 2011, and the governing of a nation takes priority.

#### Joint Vision Statement Objectives

Field Manual 6-22, the United States Army's keystone leadership manual, states that the ability to provide a clear vision is vital to a strategic leader in that a vision provides a compass to guide an organization. For the vision to provide purpose, direction and motivation, the strategic leader must commit to it and pursue the goals and objectives that will spread the vision throughout the organization and make it a

reality.<sup>23</sup> President Obama and President Lee have both committed to the Joint Vision Statement objectives. The question is can the two nations get there, by themselves, from where they currently are or will the Alliance have to employ a third party to exert influence over a reluctant North Korea to achieve these objectives?

The first objective, and arguably the most important, of the four objectives agreed upon by President Obama and President Lee is to ensure a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula and the region. Both nations share a commitment to the fundamental values of open societies, democracy and free markets.<sup>24</sup> Peace and stability on the peninsula has not only brought prosperity and economic growth to South Korea, but it has permitted and facilitated development and economic growth for its neighbors in the region as well. Japan, China, and Russia have all benefited from a secure and stable Korean Peninsula. According to 2010 statistics, China and Japan account for over one-third of both South Korea's import and export activity.<sup>25</sup> By the United States employing all the elements of her national power (diplomacy, information, military, and economic) over the last six decades, the United States established the stable platform by which nations in this region could flourish and develop.

To this day, diplomatic relations between the United States and South Korea continue to play a pivotal role in American policy making. The partnership and friendship that has been forged between the United States and South Korea is built on shared sacrifice and anchored on shared democratic values.<sup>26</sup> During the Korean War more than 33,000 United States service members were killed in action, 92,000 plus were wounded and another 8,000 United States service members still remain unaccounted

for to this day. South Korea also suffered grave losses to its nation with over 220,000 combat deaths and 700,000 wounded.<sup>27</sup> South Korea has served alongside the United States as one of our staunchest allies over the years in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti. As allies, the United States and South Korea have faced numerous North Korean provocations together over the years since the Armistice Agreement was signed.

“Katchi Kapshida”<sup>28</sup> which means “We go together” is not just a mantra but actions backed up by the power of the entire United States military working side by side with their South Korean military counterparts to ensure a secure and peaceful nation.

Military-to-Military engagement continues on a daily basis throughout South Korea. Through a detailed training and transition plan the South Korean military is transforming and maturing in order to assume military wartime operational control (OPCON) of all forces during wartime by the end of 2015.

United States economic power has played a large role in the past with the funding of reconstruction of infrastructure and institution building in South Korea following the cessation of hostilities. South Korea is truly an economic success story, evolving from a country that was devastated by war to the world’s 12<sup>th</sup> largest economy. Its 2010 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was worth \$929 billion, or 1.5% of the world economy.<sup>29</sup> Its GDP per capita rank is 40<sup>th</sup> in the world with a per capita income of \$31,700.<sup>30</sup> South Korea is a leading manufacturer and exporter of automobiles, ships, consumer electronics, communications equipment, chemicals and semi-conductors. South Korean students are continuously ranked in the top three countries in the world in education, particularly in the subjects of reading, math and science.<sup>31</sup> In 1988, its capital city of Seoul hosted the Summer Olympics, and recently hosted the G20 Summit in

November 2011. It will host the Nuclear Security Summit in 2012. Once a recipient of international aid, now South Korea is a generous donor that provides aid to underdeveloped states around the globe. Ironically, the main recipient of South Korean food aid continues to be North Korea.

However, with regime change in North Korea comes uncertainty in the future for stability of that nation's government and economy. Youth and inexperience play against the new successor Kim Jung Un, who will have to lead a communist nation that depends on humanitarian aid to feed its citizens, lacks basic human rights and has been riddled with economic sanctions for years. Elder North Korean government elites and hardline military officers will undoubtedly have undue influence over their new leader as he tries to maintain their loyalty and control a population that is governed by fear. The North Korean Government historically does not trust the Governments of the United States or the Republic of Korea. This lack of trust most likely will not change as evidenced by the recent missile launches after the announcement of the death of Kim Jung II.

Historically, North Korea has only trusted and opened up to influence of the Government of the People's Republic of China. As evidenced by their overt participation in the Korean War, China has had a long political and diplomatic history with North Korea. As North Korea's largest trading partner and chief benefactor, China cannot control North Korea's behavior; however, it can definitely influence it and apply pressure. China exercised its influence to bring North Korea to the Six Party Talks negotiation table several times. Since the early 1990's, North Korea's dependence on Chinese exports continued to grow. China provides 80% of North Korea's consumer

goods, 45% of its food and 90% of its energy supply.<sup>32</sup> Both China and the United States, as stakeholders in the region, have a vested interest in the security and stability of a peaceful and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula.

The second objective is setting the stage for a peaceful reunification on the principles of a free democracy and a market economy. Although this is a long term goal of both nations, it is not unrealistic to ascertain a unified Korea in this century. In the wake of German reunification in 1989 and the Arab Spring that is currently occurring on the African continent, it is not unfeasible that a regime change could arise if Kim Jung Un fails to gain the allegiance of his government and military, or implosion of a totalitarian dictatorship could occur resulting in the unification of North and South Korea. Reunification, as stated previously, is a goal of the North Korean Government to reunite the Motherland but under a totally different set of circumstances whereby the country would be united under communist rule and a “socialist democracy guaranteeing its citizens the full range of individual liberties and rights provided by many liberal regimes, and more.”<sup>33</sup> However, to be reunited under the conditions set forth previously by the North Korean Government and what they are currently promulgating would involve an aggressive provocation ultimately leading to an armed conflict with South Korea and the United States.

North Korea’s most important priority under Kim Jung II was regime survival. Regime Survival had required securing the loyalty of the military forces and the elites within North Korea. To maintain the military’s loyalty, the North Korean regime devoted up to one-third of its available resources to maintaining and developing its conventional and asymmetric capabilities under the rubric of a “military first” or “Seongun” policy.”<sup>34</sup>

The result was a very robust military at the expense of the malnourishment and the eventual starvation of the North Korean people and its lagging economy. The North Korean economy has been described “as the world’s largest contingent liability.”<sup>35</sup> North Korea is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> of 177 countries in the 2011 Failed States Index Rank.<sup>36</sup> It is highly dependent on international food and economic aid to survive. Regardless, if Kim Jung Un is in power or another government “selected” successor replaces him, in order to maintain the status quo in North Korea the military will have to be exorbitantly supplied and resourced. It does not have the capability to sustain itself.

Since there is a host of scenarios that could lead to the eventual reunification of the peninsula, the United States and South Korean Alliance must continue to shape the environment to set the conditions to ensure a society based on a free democracy and a market economy. All the elements of national power from both nations would have to be utilized to attain this objective, with the most prominent element being information followed by economic assistance. Access to information and the ability to provide access to a free press, the internet and unobstructed communications at all levels will be critical to instilling democracy in North Korea. Voice of America in Asia and Radio Free Asia are vital instruments of the information network that does and would continue to play an even more dominate role if reunification should occur.

Reunification poses many security challenges for China as well as South Korea. Potential refugee surges, economic instability and border security to name a few, if the two nations were to suddenly unite either in a permissive or non-permissive environment, all of which would have major economic impact on the Chinese Government. China has a vested interest in the potential reunification of the Korean

Peninsula, as reunification threatens its ability to exert power and influence over its communist neighbor. Convincing China to support a democratically united Korean Peninsula will require an enormous effort by the United States diplomats using every element of national power.

Reunification in a controlled setting vice an implosion scenario would be in China's best interest politically and economically. China views North Korea as its backyard and wants stability.<sup>37</sup> Reunification under this scenario would allow China to exert its influence in order to help shape the conditions under which unification takes place without absorbing the cost of reunification. Concessions by the United States and South Korea troop formations would be inevitable in order for the Chinese to accept a unified state. Assuring the Chinese that US troops would continue to be stationed below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel could convince China to support reunification.

The third objective is to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programs and ballistic missiles. Currently, there are only five recognized nuclear states under the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. However, there are several additional countries (Israel, India, Pakistan, Syria and Iran) that have the capability and are recognized as key players in the nuclear arena. North Korea aspires to use the prestige of a nuclear nation and leverage that capability to its advantage on the world stage. Being a nuclear state actor has been and remains a powerful identity issue for the country. Recognizing that fact and understanding the "military first" policy, the United States has worked continuously and incessantly through diplomatic and economic channels to bring the North Korean Government back to the negotiation table through the Six-Party Talk process.

However, there are challenges that have to be overcome, created by the maturity of nuclear power as an energy source for both North and South Korea. Nuclear power plants are a key source of energy for both North and South Korea. At issue is not the responsible use of nuclear power as a source of energy, but the use of nuclear fissile materials and technology as a means for production of weapons of mass destruction. Stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and securing nuclear materials are among the United States' top priorities as outlined in the National Security Strategy.

The Six-Party Talk process has failed to bring about the denuclearization of North Korea. North Korea has boycotted nuclear disarmament talks within the Six-Party framework since 2009. With the unpredictability and uncertainty of the North Korean leadership, the urgency to reevaluate the United States influence strategies is essential to the continued cooperative security and stability in the Northeast Asia region. The United States currently addresses North Korean's nuclear program through a combination of economic and political sanctions and diplomatic pressure from the international community. These methods have proven ineffective and have caused the country to continue to slip deeper into isolation and end up negatively impacting the North Korean population more than the regime itself. The Six-Party Talk framework is the main vehicle for negotiations. However, since North Korea has refused to participate in the talks, negotiations have come to a standstill.

In order to achieve the objective of elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear programs, the United States and South Korea must look at an alternative course of action. A collaborative comprehensive engagement approach with China to leverage their influence over North Korea to resume the Six-Party Talk process could achieve

this objective. China has a vested interest in not having another nuclear nation on its borders particularly one that is unpredictable and unstable as stated recently by China's ambassador to the United Nations. "It is China's consistent and unwavering position to achieve denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia," said Cheng Jingye.<sup>38</sup>

The United States and China can work together to address these shared security challenges. Engagement and political pressure by China combined with United States economic aid, development incentives, and alternative energy sources such as geothermal and wind power could drive North Korea to reevaluate its current political and economic situation. In return for their cooperation and participation at the negotiation table, North Korea would receive economic, food, development and energy aid and most importantly - recognition on the world stage. Global recognition as the new legitimate leader of North Korea could provide Kim Jun Un the political recognition and status needed to maintain power over regime and military elites. Failure to cooperate could result in loss of economic, political and development opportunities and increased global isolation.

The fourth and final objective is to promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people. The Korean people have a long and proud history. Koreans are an ethnically and linguistically homogenous population that prides itself on sense of family unity, history, academic excellence and a strong work ethic. Although many Korean families have been separated by war and the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, their love for and loyalty to their separated family members has only deepened.

The North Korean people have suffered from repetitive floods and famine over the years. The cold, mountainous terrain in North Korea does not lend itself to high quality farm land. Food shortages coupled with a dysfunctional government food distribution system have continually plagued the country. Funneling food aid directly to the military forces first under the Seongun policy, have deprived citizens which has caused malnutrition and at times starvation. This has been widely reported by those who have defected from North Korea. The flight of North Koreans into China and the existence of massive political prisoner camps attest to deep dissatisfaction within the population.<sup>39</sup>

As a communist totalitarian regime, North Korea is globally known for its lack of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, closed borders and a government regulated closed society. Citizens are not allowed to travel freely within or outside the country. All forms of media are owned and operated by the government. According to the official DPRK website, “the government and the people are one. There [is] no distinction of them.”<sup>40</sup>

Although fundamental human rights are of great importance to Americans and South Koreans, they are not valued as high by the Chinese Government. Therefore, in order to achieve this objective, the United States and South Korea would have to influence the Chinese through a host of diplomatic, economic and trade incentives. Using diplomatic, information, economic elements of national power, the United States and South Korea should address North Korea’s human rights violations and at the international level at the United Nations. Focusing on North Korea’s chronic and systemic self-inflicted food crisis would rally the international community to continue to

pressure the North Korean Government. Calling attention to North Korea's failing economy, food scarcity, and oppressive population while it continues to draw humanitarian food aid and divert it for government use from the west further reinforces the claim that North Korea is a failing state.

### How Do We Get There?

Given the context of China's application of the political realism theory, some of its interests conflict with the objectives established in the Alliance's Joint Vision Statement. Political realism is a view of international politics whereby states are "concerned about their own security, act in the pursuit of their own national interests and struggle for power."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, China may be reluctant to support the Alliance's achievement of their objectives without there being some substantial political or economic benefit to them.

The best way to obtain China's support would be to prioritize the Joint Vision Statement's objectives and work to achieve them in order. While there is not a clean break between where one ends and another begins, beginning work to achieve the objectives that closely match China's interests would increase the likelihood of success and gain momentum to ultimately achieve all of the objectives in the Joint Vision Statement. The order in which the Alliance should focus its efforts is:

1. To eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programs, and ballistic missiles
2. To ensure a peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula and the region
3. To set the stage for a peaceful reunification of North and South Korea on the principles of a free democracy and a market economy

4. To promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people

The first two objectives are consistent with China's National Defense Strategy in that they involve stabilizing the region and removing or ending de-stabilizing activities. "China advocates resolving the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula peacefully through dialogues and consultations, endeavoring to balance common concerns through holding Six-Party Talks in order to realize denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula and maintain peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia."<sup>42</sup>

Strategically, it would be in the best interest of the Alliance to concentrate on the first two objectives with China first, and when accomplished work towards the third and fourth objectives. The Alliance would have to politically and economically demonstrate that it is in China's best self-interest to collaborate with the final two objectives. The third objective of reunification will likely be the most difficult to achieve, as China is sensitive to having a competitor on its border, as was evidenced in 1950. A diplomatic security agreement would likely need to be established detailing measures to alleviate their concerns.

The Chinese Government recognizes that there is room for improvement in its human rights conditions. They released a position paper titled "Progress in China's Human Rights in 2009," whereby they acknowledged that China is a developing nation with 1.3 billion people and that due to inadequate and unbalanced development, there is still much room for improvement in its human rights.<sup>43</sup> The paper went on to state that the Chinese Government was taking effective measures to promote sound development and social harmony in order to build a more harmonious society to ensure that their

people enjoy a more dignified and happier life.<sup>44</sup> The Alliance can capitalize on this opportunity to support the Chinese Government in their progress towards promoting and protecting human rights.

### Conclusion

President Obama and President Lee set the path for the future on June 16, 2009 when they both signed and endorsed their Joint Vision Statement for the Alliance of the United States and the Republic of Korea. President Obama stated that, “The challenges of our young century can only be met through partnership, and the United States is honored to partner with the Korean people.”<sup>45</sup> After examining and analyzing the different aspects of the questions, “Can we get there?” and “Can the United States/Republic of Korea Alliance reach these objectives alone or should we collaborate with the People’s Republic of China to leverage their influence?” the analysis submits the following conclusions:

The United States/Republic of Korea Alliance is a strong and enduring bond that was forged during the Korean War and has remained cemented throughout the sixty years of enforcement of the Armistice Agreement. North Korea presents a multifaceted volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) problem set for the Alliance, the region and the global community. North Korea not only presents a conventional military threat but an even more powerful nuclear weapons and continued proliferation threat. In addition, its lack of respect for fundamental human rights continues to degrade its population, both physically through constant food shortages and mentally through oppressive government regime. Uncertainty and unpredictability will continue to plague

the Korean Peninsula until Kim Jung Un establishes himself and gains the loyalty of the North Korean Government elites and military hardliners.

The Joint Vision Statement does provide the Alliance the direction that it needs to seek in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. All four of the objectives are possible to attain but will require a robust and enduring Alliance defense posture and allied capabilities that support both the United States' and South Korea's security interests. However, although attainment of the objectives is possible, it is more probable to occur with proper prioritization coupled with collaboration and cooperation of the Chinese Government. Tri-lateral cooperation with China will yield dividends for not only the United States and South Korea but for the entire Northeast Asia region. North Korea is a multifaceted problem that requires a multifaceted approach. The United States will and can effectively employ all its elements of national power, which requires an all of government approach.

However, a comprehensive engagement strategy leveraging Chinese influence on North Korea can set the conditions for the vision statement to become a reality in this century. China has a vested interest in the objectives set forth in the vision statement, particularly those objectives that support their national interests. By partnering with China in a carefully measured incremental process and employing all the elements of national power, the United States and South Korea can realize their shared vision.

### Endnotes

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